GOD'S JUDGMENTS INTENDED FOR WARNINGS AS WELL AS PUNISHMENTS:

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE PARISH-CHURCHES OF
ST. LAWRENCE AND ST. MICHAEL,
SOUTHAMPTON,

On SUNDAY, DECEMBER the 14th, 1800;

AFTER READING

HIS MAJESTY'S PROCLAMATION,

ENJOINING

ECONOMY and FRUGALITY in the USE of GRAIN.

By the Rev. THOMAS MEARS, M. A.

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1608/3664.

(To the Right Honorable
Lord Auckland
from his most respectful
servant
the Author.

TO THE PARISHIONERS

OF

ST. LAWRENCE, ST. JOHN, AND ST. MICHAEL'S,

AND THE RESPECTIVE CONGREGATIONS
OF THOSE CHURCHES,

AS A SMALL RETURN FOR THE HEART-FELT SATISFACTION
THEY HAVE AFFORDED HIM, BY APPROVING OF IT;

AND WITH HIS UNCEASING PRAYERS FOR THEIR HAPPINESS,
BOTH HERE AND HEREAFTER;

THIS SERMON

IS VERY HUMBLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR FAITHFUL AND AFFECTIONATE MINISTER,

THOMAS MEARS.

SOUTHAMPTON;
Dec. 22, 1800.

MATTHEW VI. 11.

"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."

THESE words, and indeed the whole of that moſt excellent of all prayers which contains them, muſt, we ſhould ſuppoſe, be leſs ſeriouſly conſidered than they certainly deſerve; or they would make a much deeper impreſſion on our minds, than is generally diſcoverable in the manners and conduct of thoſe who nevertheleſs ſo often make uſe of them. One ſhould hope, that a due ſenſe of our entire dependance upon the Almighty for all the neceſſaries of life, which this petition is intended ſo conſtantly to remind us of, is not wholly deſtroyed: and yet if it is not, under the preſſure we at preſent feel of a temporary deprivation of his uſual bounties, who is there that can lay his hand upon his heart, and ſay with truth, that he has, as he ought, aſked for or tried to deſerve the bleſſings he enjoys?

Yet ſhould not all do this, when they conſider that ſcarcity of bread was expreſsly one of thoſe four

four ſore judgments, with which the Almighty has declared he will viſit and puniſh the ſins and ingratitude of a guilty land.* Thoſe judgments may be regarded not only as puniſhments for paſt offences, but as warnings alſo to prevent greater; and as there is every reaſon therefore to conclude that they will be milder or more ſevere, in proportion as the meaſure of our iniquities ſhall deſerve, it will greatly behove us, at ſuch a time as this, not only to reflect upon our ſins with a view to repentance, but alſo to reſolve henceforth to avoid ſuch cauſes of provocation, leſt a worſe thing happen unto us.†

All ſin is ingratitude to God, becauſe it is an evil and offenſive return for all the goodneſs and mercy which we daily experience at his hands. And ſin there is enough of every kind (with ſorrow and ſhame be it ſpoken), to prove us ungrateful to our heavenly Benefactor, even beyond the hope of pardon. But in all his judgments, however ſevere they may be (and it is impoſſible they can be more ſevere than we deſerve), there are, if we will avail ourſelves of them, the moſt ſalutary leſſons of mercy; there is always a deſign to amend, as well as to correct; to puniſh, it is true, yet ſo as to ſave rather than to deſtroy the

* Ezekiel xiv.

† See Biſhop Wilſon's Sermon xlviii. during a ſcarcity in the year 1741.

objects

objects of it. If this laſt and moſt gracious intention does not take effect, it is the fault of thoſe who are reprobate beyond all hope of amendment, and inſenſible to every thing that can be done for their good. They cannot feel what ſhould rouſe them from the ſleep of death; or they are ſurrounded by darkneſs, becauſe they obſtinately ſhut their eyes againſt the light; under which darkneſs they will deſperately blaſpheme, and die.

That this may not, by the bleſſing of Almighty goodneſs on our efforts, be our own caſe, it will behove us, beſides turning our minds to a general hatred and abhorrence of all ſin, particularly to conſider, what ſingular inſtance of ingratitude to God, our preſent affliction may be intended to puniſh, and how therefore we ſhould in future take warning to avoid it. Here too we ſhall at once diſcover a wonderful inſtance of that mercy, which, as I have juſt obſerved, is always blended with divine juſtice; for in the very amendment of our fault, is pointed out the moſt efficacious, and perhaps only, way, not only of averting in future, but of leſſening and removing, if it pleaſe God, our preſent puniſhment.

It has been ſaid, and by the voice of truth itſelf, that "when God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteouſneſs;"

neſs;"*—God grant this may be our caſe, for there is moſt dreadful occaſion for it; and in nothing more perhaps, than that we have, like the ungrateful Iſraelites of old, "waxed fat and kicked" at our only Benefactor, till we have almoſt wholly forgotten that it is he that hath given us "corn and wine and oil,"†—every bleſſing we can poſſibly wiſh for or enjoy: for it is but too certain, that the people of this land have really been pampered to the full: they have ſo long enjoyed plenty, they have ſo long revelled in a profuſion of the good things of this world, to a degree utterly unknown to almoſt every other nation upon earth, that now that we have ſome cauſe to dread that the puniſhment which the Almighty denounced on the Iſraelites for their ingratitude,—namely, that "he would take away their corn, that their land ſhould mourn, and every one that dwelt therein ſhould languiſh, that the beaſts of the field, with the fowls of heaven, yea the fiſhes of the ſea alſo, ſhould be taken away,"‡—is in like manner threatening us; even now ſuch are the diſmal effects of our prodigal and ſcandalous abuſe of God's mercies, that we cannot eaſily bring ourſelves to a provident care and application, when it is become abſolutely neceſſary, of our daily bread; but muſt have it, not as He

* Iſaiah xxvi. 9. † Hoſea ii. 8, 9. ‡ Hoſea iv. 3.

ſeeth

ſeeth good to give or withhold it, but in the meaſure and kind, exactly ſuch as we have been uſed to, and think fit to demand.

This then I would moſt earneſtly point out to you as a dreadful crime; as well for the abuſe it probably and almoſt certainly leads to, of thoſe good things which God has given us for our uſe and comfort, as for the brutal inſenſibility it betrays to the wants of others; who, by not having the means of ſuch profuſion, are really deprived of what is abſolutely neceſſary to exiſtence, and even the ſmalleſt ſhare of what was equally intended, as it is equally neceſſary to the ſupport and ſuſtenance of all: and in concluſion, I would urge the neceſſity there is, on both theſe grounds, of ſome temporary reſtraints, in order to meet a preſent emergency, more than may be always convenient (or rather let me ſay agreeable) when they are not ſo indiſpenſably called for.

Too many however are with difficulty brought to think that this can ever be the caſe, merely becauſe they do not like to be told that they muſt not always eat, and drink, and enjoy themſelves as they are uſed to do. Perhaps if they had never done this ſo much, it would have been better for them; as well for the miſchief they have brought upon themſelves, as the wrong they have thereby done to others. For let any one who ever eats or drinks at all more than is abſolutely neceſſary, only reflect that there is another probably ſtarving

within his reach, whom that ſuperfluity would have fed; and I ſhould think he might, without any extraordinary ſenſibility, eaſily feel a more painful monitor of his crime, than that very uſual one, of any exceſs,—an aching head, or an overloaded ſtomach. What then ſhall we ſay of the glutton, and the drunkard; thoſe who would not only ſtarve others, but even their own children, to pamper their own brutal appetites; but that they are ſuch monſters as, we ſhould hope, cannot exiſt:—and yet how many, of both deſcriptions perhaps, of one certainly, do our alehouſes and other places of entertainment conſtantly, and I am ſorry to add, on the ſabbath-day generally, furniſh; conſuming the produce of a whole week in the exceſs of a few hours; whilſt their children are naked and ſtarving at home, and they themſelves railing at the exorbitant price of all the neceſſaries of life: which they cannot afford to buy, becauſe (let them tell the truth) they are ſo often ſpending their money upon what is not neceſſary.

But it is not only theſe, who ſo immediately feel its effects, that have to anſwer for the ſame criminal profuſion. There may be others who can afford all this; though do not let them on that account think they are at all leſs guilty. They are equally anſwerable for any abuſe of God's bleſſings; and whoever ſets up this ſelf-ſufficient defence,—I can pay for it without injuring myſelf or others, and therefore will have it,—will therein find

find that he is not only wrong in his own calculation, but that in the end he will have an account to ſettle, either in this world or the next, which he never thought of.

As to not injuring others, if he really thinks ſo, it is a miſtake; for is it not certain that, if they who can afford it, will purchaſe the luxuries, or even the neceſſaries of life, beyond what they abſolutely want and cannot do without, at any price to which they may extend, they are not only creating a moſt ſhameful waſte of that article, which its very dearneſs proves to be ſcarce, or at leaſt not eaſily, and therefore not generally, to be procured, but that, if this article be a neceſſary of life and alſo ſcarce, they are thereby erecting the moſt ſcandalous and effectual monopoly that ever could be deviſed, for ſtarving perhaps two-thirds of their fellow-creatures? Can any one then, as to what more immediately concerns himſelf, who does this, ſtand clear before God, however fair and legally honeſt he may be in the ſight of men? He does not perhaps ſteal; nor by any unfair means obtain what he has; neither does he throw his bread into the dirt: but how much better does he do, if he will not give others a poſſibility of ſharing it with him; or if, by any means, he unneceſſarily conſume more than he abſolutely requires? No one ſurely can reflect, as he ought, that all his own dependance, even for his daily bread, is upon God; and not at the

ſame time remember, that to deſerve his love, we were told by his bleſſed Son, that we muſt love one another.

But to meet this argument: there are many, and thoſe by no means wanting in common charity, or compaſſion for the real diſtreſſes of their neighbours, who nevertheleſs ſeem to think and reaſon, as if the reſtrictions they are now required to ſubmit to, were not neceſſary; becauſe there is no abſolute want, but only that all the articles of food are by ſome unfair means kept at a higher price than they ought to be: and therefore that however ready and willing they may be to ſave for the poor, they cannot bring themſelves to do ſo only to put money into the pockets of thoſe who do not want it, and have already too much, conſidering how it was got. But ſurely if ſuch reaſoning can be ſeriouſly entertained, is there not in it a moſt obvious and deſtructive miſtake? For what can more favour ſuch extortion, if it is ſo, or what muſt more certainly keep up the exorbitant price, than our not retrenching the conſumption of the article, but only when we have abſolutely not money to pay for it? If it is not purchaſed, or in ſuch large quantities as uſual, the money that is not ſpent, certainly cannot go into the pockets of thoſe, who, in that caſe, will not be able to ſell: there will then be ſo much more of the ſtock remaining for thoſe who want it; which muſt ultimately tend to reduce the price;

or we at leaſt are not ourſelves anſwerable (and a dreadfully heavy charge it will one day or other be, on thoſe who are), for contributing to increaſe it, as we certainly ſhould do, by a ſuperfluous and waſteful abuſe of it.

As for there not being a real ſcarcity, I can only ſay, as I ſincerely think, that it would very little become me, or any individual, to queſtion the truth on which the Proclamation I have juſt now read to you is wholly founded;—a truth inveſtigated, confirmed, and publicly declared, by the great council of the nation, on a ſubject, on which, if they have not been deceived themſelves (and after ſuch minute, laborious, and diligent inveſtigation, I do not eaſily ſee how they could), it is certainly one, if ever there was, on which they can have had no intereſt to deceive others.

And in that caſe, the value of even the moſt eſſential articles of life, becomes, however more diſtreſſing, a very different object of conſideration. No man can be allowed to ſay to another,—You ſhall ſell the produce of your ground, or the fruits of your labour, not for what you know they are worth, but for what I think proper and reaſonable to give you. Such a doctrine is no more fair to a dealer in one article, than in another; and if adopted in one caſe, there is no reaſon why it ſhould not be in all; and then let every one make that caſe his own. But is not ſuch diſ-

treſs

treſs as we now ſee, and are likely to ſee more of, to be relieved? Certainly, if there is unfair dealing, the laws are known; and of late, they ſeem to have been rigorouſly and juſtly enforced: but from my heart I hope there cannot be many, who can ſteel their conſciences againſt the curſe both of God and man, againſt the tears and groans of the poor, the deteſtation of every thing good here, and the apprehenſion of every thing dreadful hereafter. If however there is this rapacious ſpirit in ſome, is there not alſo that generally prevailing and ruinous habit of luxury, extravagance, and diſſipation, which muſt ſupply it, and without which it could not exiſt? "The times are hard," is an exclamation in every one's mouth. They are ſo indeed! But how are they felt, or where do we even yet ſee their effects? It is not ſurely in the dreſs, the amuſements, the pleaſures and expences of thoſe, who notwithſtanding ſay that they feel them the moſt. But they are already to be ſeen in the increaſing miſery, depreſſion, and ſordid appearance of the poor; and in the lean, famiſhed, and cruelly tortured ſtate of thoſe moſt noble, uſeful, but ill-treated animals, which Heaven has given us to ſhare our labours, to procure us comforts, and to give us reſt. There however they cannot long be confined; they will gradually climb up to the higher orders of ſociety; whoſe thoughtleſs extravagance will haſten, and render any thing like real diſtreſs to themſelves more intolerable.

At a moment therefore in which this danger ſeems particularly to threaten us, we ſhould hope that none will be found to murmur at, or to object to, reſtrictions, which are ſolely intended to make the evil not only lighter to others, but alſo to themſelves. Let us now ſhew our ſenſe of God's undeſerved goodneſs, and our repentance for ſo much and ſuch ungrateful abuſe of it, by ſubmitting to his puniſhment; and whilſt we implore him to remove it, do our utmoſt, by every proper means, to lighten and reduce its weight. They who have thoſe means more in their power, are eſpecially required to apply them to the utmoſt; in order to render the like effort as little neceſſary as poſſible to thoſe who have them not. The duty of economy and frugality is indeed indiſpenſable to rich and poor alike; but the former, as they have much more to ſpare, can certainly practiſe it with greater advantage to others, and leſs inconvenience to themſelves; whilſt the little which the latter can poſſibly have, no one, who thinks and feels like a Chriſtian, would wiſh to make leſs; but only for them, as well as all others, to refrain from every unneceſſary and improper habit of waſte or expence. There is alſo one claſs in particular, who are called on by every inducement, not to throw obſtacles (as there have been ſome inſtances of, though I hope more to the contrary) in the way of ſuch efforts to relieve a common diſtreſs; when they recollect what their

own

own ſituation at the time is, compared with what it muſt be, if deprived of that which they ſeem to think is to exempt them from every inconvenience which all around them ſo ſeverely feel. To the unpardonable indifference of the rich, if ſuch there can be, who really know not what poverty is, they add the monſtrous ingratitude of not acknowledging that they are relieved from its preſſure only ſo long as they retain their places, and the ſtrange inſenſibility of not perceiving that they muſt be expoſed to it again, the moment they loſe them. In the families where they live, we ſhould hope they would ſee the moſt rigid economy enforced by example; and that they, and all, will not only patiently but cheerfully ſubmit to it, as the only means of relieving the diſtreſſes of each other. For we ſhall thereby learn to our preſent advantage, by being ſatisfied, how little is really ſufficient for the life of man; and, we devoutly hope, to our everlaſting comfort, whilſt we are thus taught by his judgments to know and ſet a proper value upon his mercies, how we have fatally loſt, and how therefore only we can regain, the favour of Him to whom we are commanded to pray, and on whom we muſt wholly depend, to "give us our daily bread."

THE END.

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